THE WORK-LIFE INTERFACE AND THE ROLE OF HR: EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCES IN BRAZIL

Work-life studies address an individual's need to reconcile work and non-work aspects of life. With the increasing demands in both spheres, organizations have responded by developing policies and programs aimed at alleviating conflict and providing support for workers. However, the concepts of work-life balance and work-life conflict were constructed within a particular time and place and thus may be culture and context-specific. Despite an increasing trend in cross-cultural work-life studies, most research has focused on developed countries and a key issue remains examining whether theories, models and findings are valid in a less comparable setting. The present research contributes to this understanding by examining the work-life interface from the perspective of human resource professionals in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Findings suggest that there is little organizational support beyond what is mandated by the government and the prevalence of informal arrangements. In addition, there is a remarkable difference in terms of work-life provisions between Brazilian and multinational firms.

Keywords: work-life interface, work-family interface, work-life support, organizational policies, human resources professionals, Brazil

Los estudios de work-life (trabajo-vida) abordan la necesidad de un individuo de conciliar los aspectos laborales y no laborales de la vida. Con las crecientes demandas en ambos ámbitos, las organizaciones han respondido desarrollando políticas y programas destinados a aliviar los conflictos y brindar apoyo a los trabajadores. Sin embargo, los conceptos de equilibrio trabajo-vida y conflicto trabajo-vida fueron construidos dentro de un tiempo y lugar particulares y, por lo tanto, pueden ser específicos para una cultura y un contexto. A pesar de una tendencia creciente en los estudios interculturales de vida laboral, la mayoría de las investigaciones se han centrado en los países desarrollados y un tema clave sigue siendo examinar si las teorías, los modelos y los hallazgos son válidos en un contexto menos comparable. La presente investigación contribuye a esta comprensión al examinar la interfaz entre la vida laboral y personal desde la

perspectiva de los profesionales de recursos humanos en Río de Janeiro, Brasil. Los hallazgos sugieren que hay poco apoyo organizativo más allá de lo que exige el gobierno y la prevalencia de acuerdos informales. Además, existe una diferencia notable en cuanto a disposiciones trabajo-vida entre empresas brasileñas e multinacionales.

Palabras clave: trabajo-vida, trabajo-familia, apoyo, políticas organizacionales, profesionales de recursos humanos, Brasil

Introduction

Discussions on work-life issues have become more prominent worldwide due to the increasing demands confronted by individuals from the separate, and often conflicting, spheres of work and home and the sometimes 'permeable boundaries' between these two domains (Poelmans, 2005). These issues are overwhelmingly universal. However, they may affect individuals, organizations, institutions and countries differently, since theories, models and findings may not be valid in a less comparable setting (Kossek et al., 2010; Poelmans, 2005; Spector et al., 2004). Indeed, the very concept of work-life balance or the lack thereof was constructed within a particular time and place. Thus, it may be culture and context-specific (De Bruin & Dupuis, 2004; Lewis, Gambles & Rapoport, 2007). Even if the types of issues addressed within work-family policies are generally expanding, what is considered to be a work-family or work-life issue can vary greatly from country to country (Kossek, 2015).

Most work-life research was originally conducted in Anglo-Saxon countries (58% in the United States) with very few studies coming from regions such as South America and Africa (Chang et al., 2009). More recently, a new wave of research has targeted countries other than the United States. For example, studies by Abendroth and Den Dulk (2011) and Den Dulk and colleagues (2013) have shown there to be a variety of nuances in the European work-life interface and the way that governments, organizations and individuals interact. In addition, India and other Eastern countries have received increasing attention and reached an international audience (e.g. Rajadhyaksha, 2012).

Very few scholarly articles have been published about work-life in Brazil (Torres, 2009). A few cross-cultural studies have included the country for data collection (e.g. Carlier et al., 2012; Ruiz-Gutierrez et al., 2012), which has led to interesting cross-cultural findings. For example, Carlier and colleagues (2012) suggested that, when compared to Spain, Latin American countries tend to have more companies that are supportive of work-family balance. Nonetheless, fewer formal policies are present. At the individual level, a study by Ruiz-Gutierrez et al (2012) found there to be significant differences in work-family values when comparing four Latin American countries. Other than that, the local production of work-life literature has been slim and has often focused on the quality of work life, addressing issues such as health in the workplace and employee well-being (Ferreira et al., 2009; Lobel, 2013; Martinez & Latorre, 2006).

Brazil has been known for significant inequalities alongside a rhetoric of equality (Lovell, 1999; Melo, 2005). Although labor statistics have shown an increase in women´s participation in the workforce, considerable differences in wages and status remain between men and women (IPEA, 2014). Furthermore, authors have highlighted the key cultural dimensions of the Latin American context that impact the work-life interface such as *machismo*, a fluid approach to rules (Sorj et al., 2004), family collectivism and long working hours (Poelmans, 2005; Spector et al., 2004).

Indeed, several unique characteristics distinguish Brazil from Anglo-Saxon countries. Firstly, there is a staggering amount of unregulated work and access to organizational policies that is available to only a few registered workers (Sorj et al., 2004). More specifically, about half of the Brazilian population works under informal arrangements, without a proper "work card", and therefore, is excluded from benefiting from labor legislation provided by the state such as unemployment security and pension funds (IBGE, 2013). The "work card" or *carteira de trabalho*, is an official obligatory work document created in 1932 that registers all employment contracts an individual has signed (MTE, 2016).

Secondly, in Brazil, Human Resources (HR) usually does not have a prominent role in developing and enacting work-life policies. For one, any work-life policies and programs offered are implemented in a manner that can be described as 'timid' (Sorj et al., 2004: 2). Research also suggests that strategic HR is still in its infancy in Brazil, as it is largely operational (Coda & Falcone, 2004; Tanure et al., 2010). Therefore, most HR arrangements are

informal and arranged directly between the employee and their supervisor. HR often remains a mediator or an auditor that guarantees adherence to labor laws in the workplace.

Some researchers have identified examples of management rhetoric, by which organizations claim to be utilizing a Western, American style of HR but in practice, HR is not given its proper position as a partner in business (Tanure et al., 2010). Authors have suggested that Brazil is half a century behind in terms of HR development, arguing that improvements in the field are mainly due to the entry of multinationals and, thus, the import of management practices and techniques (Tanure et al., 2010). According to Neto and Sant'anna (2013), there is a unanimous perception that HR is centered on the operational dimension.

The social construction of work-life policies, as well as the context in which they are embedded, matters for the understanding of those policies and the way in which they can affect the work-life scenario. Nevertheless, context and framing are often overlooked in studies (Kossek & Ollier-Malaterre, 2013; Lewis et al., 2007), particularly in understudied regions such as Brazil. To address this gap, this research contributes to the management field by attempting to describe and understand the work-life interface in the Brazilian context, with a particular focus on the role of HR and the impact of organizations and their policies on individual work-life challenges.

Theoretical Background

Organizational work-life policies

Organizational work-life policies refer to the formal arrangements offered by firms to assist their employees in managing their professional and personal lives (Anderson et al., 2002; Eaton, 2003). Although there is not a specific definition for work-life policies or practices, at a minimum, it is understood that the term refers to dependent care support, flexible work options or some type of leave (Estes & Michael, 2005). Organizational initiatives are a broader term and can be defined as "formal policies and informal arrangements allowing employees to manage their roles, responsibilities, and interests in their life as whole persons, engaged in work and non-work domains" (Ollier-Malaterre, 2009: 160). A supportive HR structure, with supportive supervision and work-life culture, may determine how an employee perceives and experiences work-life policies, initiatives or benefits (Allen, 2001; Thomas & Ganster, 1995).

This occurs because supervisors, line managers in particular, have the power to differentiate between workers and determine who uses or does not use a particular policy, thus often creating in- and out-group dynamics (Hammer et al, 2011; Lautsch et al., 2009). In addition, if an individual believes that his or her supervisor and organization will not permit the use of a policy, he or she may not access it in fear that it will be career limiting (De Cieri et al., 2005).

In terms of formal work-life policies in Brazil, much of what exists is determined by Brazilian labor legislation, consolidated in the CLT or *Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho* (the equivalent to a labor code). Examples of state policies have been included in the list below.

Brazilian Government Policies (Source: MTE, 2016)
▪ Maternity leave: 120 days (workers are guaranteed job security from when pregnancy is confirmed until 5 months after birth).
▪ Paternity leave: 5 days.
▪ Bereavement leave: 2 days.
▪ Childcare: Organizations with more than 30 female employees must have a location where the mother can breastfeed.
▪ Retirement: The government is in the process of changing current legislation. It is a combination of age and years worked, and it differs for men and women.
▪ Work hours: 8 hours every day but the law allows for 44 hours distributed in 6 days, which include 4 hours on Saturday. Night work or extra hours include an additional payment.
▪ National holidays are enjoyed by all and employees are entitled to 30 days of paid vacation once a year. There is a special calculation for vacation pay. Employees can sell back some of their vacation time for extra pay.
▪ Social security: Employers and employees contribute. It covers leaves, pensions and some types of insurance. It also covers family allowance. Employees can complement social security with private plans.
▪ Wages: There is a thirteenth salary, which is equivalent to one full monthly salary and usually paid in December. Some organizations include profit sharing, bonuses or commissions.
▪ Severance pay

▪ Transportation and food vouchers: optional
▪ Some types of occupational health needs are met by the employer – entrance and exit exams for example.
▪ Health insurance: optional. Some companies provide it with or without a co-payment.
▪ Part time work: Legislation defines as 6 hours per day.

Other major legislation includes the 1988 Brazilian Federal Constitution and the 2003 Brazilian Civil Code. The first incorporates a more egalitarian definition of family than previous constitutions, and the latter defines family in a broader sense, including single-parent families and stable unions (Sorj et al., 2004). The current legislation, CLT, may be deemed insufficient in reconciling an individuals' work and personal lives, particularly because issues arising from the imbalance between work and nonwork are not necessarily considered to be a social problem (Sorj et al., 2004).

Role theory and national culture

From a work-life perspective, role theory presents a suitable theoretical background for this study, as it is crucial to understand how multiple roles impact individual workers and how culture affects role perceptions (Guest, 2002). Role theory is by far the most ubiquitous in work-life studies. It is often associated with work-life conflict and uses the perspective that individuals fulfill different roles inside and outside of work. These roles are often incompatible and when role expectations conflict, the individual experiences role overload (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Role theory can be quite relevant for Latin America, as women are still expected to have simultaneous roles at home and at work (Ford et al., 2007).

In addition, theorizing national culture has become increasingly central as the contextualization and the examination of the work-life interface are key to the advancement of the field as a whole (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Considering social, economic and institutional environments at the macro level and how they affect individual work-life, Kossek (2015) developed a framework that places the individual at the center of these macro influences. For this reason, we have examined the possible ramifications of both organizational and governmental policies on individuals, as well the impact of national culture.

Despite the general effect that globalization has had on businesses, there are still assumptions underlying the issues that are bound by country or culture (Pitt-Catsouphes & Christensen, 2004), which means that researchers need to determine what is emic (culture-specific) and what is etic (universal) (Allen, 2001). Kluckhohn (1951: 86) defines culture as "patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values". Thus, unlike in organizational culture, where members mainly share practices, members of the same national culture share fundamental values (Garibaldi de Hilal, 2003).

Previous studies have used the national cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (1983), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2014) and the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) to help explain the effects of culture on the work-life interaction. Even though there has been criticism on the applicability of these dimensions since they are relative measures used in cross-cultural studies, they still provide a basis for theorizing and developing international approaches. The dimensions considered to be the most impactful on work-life research have been individualism versus collectivism, power distance and gender role ideology, as described in Table I. A more recent article by Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013) calls for research to include less-popular dimensions that can lead to additional insights such as humane orientation and specificity/diffusion.

TABLE I: National Culture Dimensions Most Relevant to Work-Life Studies

Individualism/Collectivism	The extent to which people perceive themselves as separate units form the family and social units or as part of a family or clan
Power Distance	The extent to which individuals accept unequal distribution of power as legitimate
Gender role ideology	The extent to which gender roles are traditional or egalitarian
Humane orientation	The extent to which individuals in organizations or societies encourage and reward individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring and kind to others

Specificity/Diffusion	Level of particularity or wholeness a culture uses to define different constructs

Adapted from Aycan (2008), Korabik, Lero & Ayman (2003) and Ollier-Malaterre et al. (2013)

In order to examine national culture, it is key to understand how the colonial society established in Brazil has developed in a patriarchal and aristocratic manner, where the family, not the individual, the state or any specific organization, was the original productive unit (Freyre, 2005). The family unit then became the basis of Brazil´s social formation with several social and economic roles integrated into it, which included the beginning of oligarchy and nepotism in political life (Freyre, 2005). However, the Brazilian ethos is such that family is not necessarily a notion that relies on blood ties. The seminal work "A Casa e a Rua" (*The Home and the Street)* by Roberto DaMatta (1997) emphasizes a key aspect of Brazilian society, which is the idea of "home" and "the street". These are not necessarily geographical spaces, but moral entities and spheres of social action. The house or home can encompass a variety of social spaces – seen as personal as well – a neighborhood, an organization, even a country – whatever may be familiar. This can be compared to Hofstede´s (1983) idea of in-group collectivism. It can also be interpreted through DaMatta´s (1997) lens which suggests that home is wherever an individual has a permanent place in a hierarchy. On the street, individuals are anonymous and frequently mistreated by the authorities – represented by the state.

The present study addresses the work-life interface from a combination of theoretical lenses by examining both the organizational perspective (through HR and policies) and individual experiences, as influenced by cultural and contextual factors and role expectations.

Methods

The present research has an exploratory focus, shedding light on individual experiences and perspectives of the work-life scenario in a Brazilian context. A qualitative approach is more suitable for this research as it aims to unveil perceptions through the discourse of the participants. Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with main questions, follow-up questions and probes that allowed for rich, contextual data. Interviews have significant advantages when compared to other methods. Since the questions were able to be reworded or repeated, the researcher could ensure that respondents understood the question and its proper dimension (Selltiz et al., 1974). Interviews are an adequate method to use to

reveal information about complex issues, as the interviewer can observe more than just what the participant says, but how he or she says it, and probe accordingly (Selltiz et al., 1974).

Procedures and Sample

The recruitment of potential respondents took place through the researchers' personal contacts, social media such as LinkedIn and partnerships with academic institutions and HR-related organizations.

Individuals are appropriate to act as informants when the property in question is a global-unit, an observable property, of which the informant has unique knowledge (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). HR representatives, in particular, are in an advantageous position to not only speak on behalf of their organization and policies, but also to report on their own role as employees, and how they view the work-life interface "in action". Indeed, a highly placed HR representative may even act as his or her organization´s informant (Green, Whitten & Medlin, 2005). These organizational informants were chosen based on their formal position and knowledge (Gupta, Shaw & Delery, 2000) and, as key informants, they were rich sources of knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Wilkinson & Young, 2004).

The general goal of the structured interviews was to make explicit the informants' perspective and to explore the data that the researchers could not observe (Patton, 2002). It is important to note the possibility of discourse bias, as those who work in HR may have a tendency to utilize, internalize and adopt the organizational discourse, even though they are also employees and as such, subject to the same policies as the other employees. However, HR, as a field, has been mostly operational in Brazil, often associated with compliance and policing roles (Coda & Falcone 2004, Tanure, Evans & Cançado, 2010). Thus, respondents may have crucial insights into what has worked or not for the organization, its workers and for themselves as policy users.

The sample consisted of men and women working in a variety of HR roles in the metropolitan areas of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, both in the South-Eastern region of Brazil. This is the most populated region in the country and where the majority of organizations, both local and international, have headquarters. The interviews were conducted with 20 Brazilian HR managers, directors and analysts. The sample included interviewees from multinational companies operating in Brazil as well as individuals from large, medium and small Brazilian organizations. Women comprised the majority of the respondents, which is understandable, as

HR has been traditionally dominated by women. All of the participants had completed higher education, with at least a Bachelor´s degree. In addition, most were married at the time of the interview and had children. In terms of company size, type and sector, there was a substantial variety in all aspects. Most importantly, there were respondents from multinational organizations as well as family-run businesses.

The interviews took place at the location where the participant worked, usually in a meeting room, with the exception of 3 interviews that occurred in coffee shops and 1 at the participant´s home. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese by one of the authors, with lengths that varied between one and two and a half hours.

Data analysis

Content analysis is a qualitative research technique used to describe a phenomenon without pre-set categories, allowing the categories to instead originate from the data through an inductive process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to the step where the data was read repeatedly, as the researchers became immersed in the whole (Tesch, 1990). This was followed by an in-depth analysis that led to a coding scheme divided into categories, reached through a systematic process of coding and extracting information (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). These categories were organized in a hierarchical manner, much like a tree diagram (Morse & Field, 1995). It must be noted that this method does not intend to create new theory, but instead to develop concepts so that an appropriate model can be built (Lindkvist, 1981).

A challenge to this approach to data analysis lies in not identifying the key categories, hence lacking credibility in terms of understanding the context as a whole. In order to avoid that, the authors resorted to peer debriefing, triangulation and member checks, as suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985).

Findings

The interviews centered on three key HR topics (namely organizational policies, HR roles, and individual employee experiences) plus an extra topic titled “others” for issues that did not pertain specifically to the previous three. Each topic was discussed alongside the major themes that were identified in the interviews, as detailed below.

Organizational Policies

The first topic focused on policies available in organizations. The themes that surfaced included the focus on government-mandated policies, the informality of work-life provisions, prejudice concerning the use of work-life policies, the wider availability of policies in multinational organizations, and finally, the impact of organizational size on policy availability.

The findings suggest that Brazilian organizations tend to focus their work-life initiatives on what is stipulated by the government. In all interviews, respondents confirmed that, at a minimum, their organization offered initiatives which included, but were not limited to, maternity leave, paternity leave, bereavement leave, and a health care plan. As one participant stated:

> 'We follow what is required by law… Anything else that is available is on a case-by-case basis. There are a lot of informal arrangements here, but they are not structured into policies. Employees discuss with their direct manager and come to some type of agreement.'

Further on into the conversations, the participants explained that there were formal and informal arrangements that took place in the organizations. There were case-by-case situations of formal benefits such as those related to school or language course financing or reimbursement. On the other hand, informal arrangements were often to do with arriving earlier or later at the beginning of the workday or leaving for certain periods of time to attend doctor's appointments for one's children or parents. Here is where the existence of a growing *sandwich generation* in Brazil becomes clear, where employees have responsibilities for dependents as well as elderly parents.

Indeed, most respondents were consistent in that several arrangements are not formalized into company policy. Rather, there were informal deals between employees and direct supervisors that functioned in an ad hoc manner. One of the exceptions to this was a participant who negotiated shorter workdays in a small Brazilian organization. In that case, the participant agreed to a cut in pay. According to Brazilian labor law, part-time work is defined as 6 hours a day, 5 times a week, whereas full-time work consists of 8 hours daily.

> ‘I now work 6 hours a day so I have more flexibility... But working 6 hours a day means that I make less money and fewer opportunities to grow professionally. This is why I see my current situation as temporary. It was a decision to improve the quality of my life and be able to dedicate more time to my children. I´m not sure how long I´ll continue in this arrangement.’

The other exception was a participant who mentioned that someone in the organization (a Brazilian medium company) took advantage of working from a home office.

> ‘We have an employee who works half a day in the office and half a day at home. But she is a huge exception. My company really doesn´t care about balance. There aren´t formal policies about that at work, but there is some flexibility... if I need to be late or leave early to take care of a personal issue I can compensate at a later time’

Some of the participants mentioned the lack of openness to flexible arrangements as a company issue, either because the leadership was not accepting of such practices or because the company culture prevented their use. The reasoning provided behind this response was that the work had to be done in the office where everyone could be reached and most important of all, seen. As one HR manager put it, ‘people do ask for flexibility in work schedules, but <the CEO> is very traditional – work is at work, so there isn´t much we can do about this’. This statement was seconded by an HR director who stated that ‘flexibility wouldn´t work here – people need to see you’. One participant summarized their organization´s attitude towards work-life policies in the following way:

> ‘Here at [name of the organization], everything is very traditional and formal, they only provide what the law demands. These programs are not really available and... are not welcome’.

The respondents from multinational organizations operating in Brazil reported a wider bundle of policies, often encompassing a set of global policies that are implemented when organizations move abroad alongside a set of localized policies. These participants often mentioned the company´s willingness to go beyond what is mandated by the government to “take care” of their employees.

> ‘We try to keep up with what´s offered in top firms. We believe that it is important to take care of our employees. One of the benefits that we have added to our portfolio helps with urban mobility. We have buses that employees can use to come to work and to leave. Everyone loves that. In addition to helping employees with transportation, it also guarantees that everyone leaves exactly at 5pm. I use it.’

Small and medium Brazilian enterprises demonstrated some difficulty enforcing and supporting government-mandated policies, and indicated that sometimes they avoid dealing with an employee´s potential work-life issues by adjusting their selection and hiring practices. For example, two participants admitted that their organization tends to favor hiring male employees in certain situations as a way of avoiding the interruption of work and the obligation of providing maternity leave. As one HR representative stated:

> ‘This is an unwritten rule, but if a female candidate says she is getting married, this may count against her because she could be getting pregnant soon. We wouldn´t want to fill a position and then have someone gone on maternity leave.’

HR Roles

Reflections regarding the role of HR appeared repeatedly in the narratives addressing company policies. This occurred when respondents described the dynamics between individual employee requests for work-life arrangements and supervisors´ reactions. Participants described the role of HR as that of a mediator, advisor, partner or payroll office – even taking on the role of the police. By far, the term mediator was the most utilized to describe the workplace relations that take place between employees and management. As one analyst described:

> ‘HR is expected to be aware of labor legislation and is often a mediator between what employees want and what managers believe should be offered, but in many cases we seem to function as ‘police’, checking who is doing something wrong.’

Some interviewees mentioned the HR department as a partner with a strategic role, and these were mostly employees in multinational organizations. According to a manager,

> ‘we are included in major decisions made by the firm. Our leadership, our director… they do not tell us what to do, they listen to our suggestions… they know we are the ones who know the people here and who interact with them’.

This was corroborated by an HR director who stated: ‘the organization is well aware that a partnership with HR is key to the success of initiatives’.

On another note, participants mentioned that employees looked to HR as a space where they were ‘heard’. This was the case in medium and large Brazilian organizations. However, in all of these cases, the HR participant was a female psychologist, who believed that their background in psychology could have influenced the employees´ behavior. Interestingly, a few of the participants mentioned the benefits of having a social worker as part of the HR staff.

Individual employee experiences

With regard to individual reports of the work-life interface, findings suggest that the participants´ experiences tend to vary based on the individual´s gender, whether they have children or not, the nature of their work, the level of support from their direct supervisors and the work-life culture of their organization. The latter seems to be particularly relevant, as the participants who had worked in family-unfriendly organizations in the past brought up the issue of organizational culture when asked about their ability to utilize their current firm´s policies.

Participants were asked about how work impacted their life outside of work and vice-versa, and the impact of technology in relation to that dynamic. Regardless of company size and type, about half of the participants felt that they separated life and work into distinct domains. According to one participant, ‘it is quite easy for me to turn off when I leave work’. Other statements included:

> ‘On weekdays my life is affected by work because I spend long days there. But, when I leave I try to turn off completely to deal with the rest of my life. I think I can separate the two well’, and ‘Today I leave work and it´s rare that I am unable to disconnect. I have a social life that is very independent and not impacted by work at all.’

The other half reported some spillage from work into the home due to technology, particularly as a consequence of having prolonged access to work e-mails. However, participants felt that this was an individual issue and that it was a personal responsibility to determine how much one allows technology to interfere with one's private life (and not necessarily due to pressure from supervisors). Below are examples of the statements used:

> 'It is up to the individual to manage how they deal with technology'
> 'My boss would love if I answered emails during the weekend, but I won´t'
> 'I may do some work from home late at night – I replied to you for example – but it´s my choice'

The participants described the interference of life outside of work on work when dealing with personal problems, and cited having friends at work in which to confide as a source of relief. Other areas of support included family, professional help at home, and therapy. The interviewees felt that dealing with life and work was a personal issue, and that the organization or the state did not have responsibility over it. By and large, the understanding of those interviewed was that there is a possibility that the organization steps in when the state does not. Often, however, the participants cited relying on a partner, extended family and hired domestic help for assistance.

> 'I couldn´t live without [maid´s name].'
> 'Most middle class families have maids and nannies who take care of the house and kids at a relatively low cost... I think this makes it easier for women to work full time.'
> 'My husband is a super-hero that helps me with many, many things – including job advice - and he deals with a big chunk of household chores, as well. My in-laws live close to us and have proven very helpful.'
> 'I don´t know what I would do without my coworkers. We know everything about each other´s lives. I definitely bring home to work rather than the other way around.'

Other Themes

Two themes emerged during the interviews that are worth mentioning: neglect and ambiguity. The first one has to do with whether or not the individuals perceive that they are neglecting any aspect of their life inside and outside of work. If that was the case, they were asked to identify

what was being neglected. Respondents provided answers that fell into one of the following four categories: none, health, family and work. Gender, marital status and being a parent seemed to impact the participants´ answers the most. Women who were married and had children often cited neglecting their partners and children, while single women without children mentioned health, which was also the answer provided by the male participants. Only one participant felt that their work was being neglected.

The second theme has to do with the ambiguity found in work-life discussions. It seems that the same ambiguity that explains aspects of the country´s national culture defines the way that individuals view and deal with their work-life issues. If ambiguity defines something that does not have a clear meaning or that may have more than one meaning, then it is the best way to describe how Brazilians view their work-life interface. The very notion of work and life can be subject to different interpretations and individuals appear to accept that as the nature of the work-life dynamic. As DaMatta (1997) states, the right word to define Brazilian culture is "*ambiguity*", and not "*diversity*".

Ambiguity in work-life is not necessarily a new theme. Role ambiguity has long been a part of the theoretical background supported by Guest´s (2002) role theory. It is expected that the demands between the work and non-work aspects of life generate some level of ambiguity. However, what was noticed in the voices of the Brazilian employees who participated in the study was ambiguity in terms of where the responsibilities for work-life issues should lie. There was a general tendency to perpetuate the organizational discourse in the beginning of the interviews, and this can perhaps be explained by the fact that participants were HR respondents. Only toward the end of the interviews were most participants willing to provide a more critical view of their employer. This is in line with findings from other under-researched countries where work-life discussions have not received much attention and are considered a non-issue. In these cases, responsibility for work-life issues often falls on the individual.

Discussion

There is no doubt that the institutional and economic contexts have an influence on the conditions that organizations provide to their workers (Dikkers et al., 2005). For example, Den Dulk and colleagues (2013) examined 19 countries in a multi-level cross-national study and found that institutional pressures in a country were associated with the adoption of work-life

arrangements by organizations, while economic pressures as captured in their research were not. More specifically, state support for the combination of work and family life was positively associated with the adoption of those organizational policies, acting as a catalyst. In situations like in Brazil, however, government regulations force organizations to provide a certain set of rights and benefits. These do not necessarily "give rise to new social expectations" by creating public awareness as argued by Den Dulk (2005) and illustrating what has been named the "spillover effect" by Rostgaard (2000). Instead, what we have found is that the organization is not perceived as a substitute of the state – and very little is expected of the state.

It is not only government regulation that has had an impact on employer involvement or the lack thereof, as preferences for work-life provisions tend to vary by country. Indeed, it is expected that the economic climate will have a large impact on what is offered or not by organizations in terms of work-life policies and programs. The Brazilian economic climate has always been rather unstable, therefore job security remains a major concern for individuals and families, and not necessarily work-life benefits – which can be considered somewhat of a novelty. In the Netherlands, for example, workers favor the availability of child care arrangements over other options (Den Dulk, 2005). In Brazil, that is not the case as there is not a lack of child-care facilities per se due to the presence of extended families, and as such – alternative care arrangements. Child care is not considered to be a responsibility of one's employers, and perhaps not even of the government as it is seen in Italy (Den Dulk, 2005). Instead, as can be observed in similar cultures, these are, by and large, private arrangements.

Another important aspect to highlight is that there is controversy over whether Brazil is a welfare state regime or not. According to Negro and Gomes (2006), the perpetual class struggle dynamic has not been able to produce a welfare state and the focus on maintaining a harmonic image has prevented social demonstrations. The authors suggest that social welfare policies end up diluted for the purpose of a neoliberal project that focuses on decentralization, privatization, outsourcing and flexibility (Negro & Gomes, 2006). Despite discussions between the state and the representatives of workers and organizations, Brazil has been moving in the neoliberal direction in search of a free market. This movement has received significant support since businesses have suffered under labor laws that are considered to be outdated and lacking in flexibility, making the hiring and firing processes lengthy and expensive (Gonzaga et al., 2003). Unions were more prevalent during the military dictatorship as a response to it, and the labor movement was strong in the late 70s and in the 80s. In the 1990s, union membership declined

(Negro & Gomes, 2006). Currently, unions are present in specific sectors as they represent groups such as state workers who are mostly in contract relationships. As a consequence, informal workers tend to be excluded (Sorj, 2004).

Kossek and colleagues (2010) argue that work-life initiatives tend to fall into one of two categories based on the type of organizational challenges that they address. Policies are structural when they support flexibility and allow for employee control – these are usually formal policies that are initiated by the organization. On the other hand, initiatives are cultural when they encompass other aspects at the group and organizational level such as organizational climate and culture, supportive supervisors and social support (Kossek et al., 2010). These involve intangible aspects that become part of the way that things are done in an organization with regard to the work-life interface, which reflect on how work-life is experienced. The present study shows that in Brazil, there is a shortage of policies in both categories. Most organizations have structural policies that follow what is mandated by the government, but they do not necessarily develop a portfolio of work-life policies that address individual needs – with the exception of some multinationals. Multinational organizations appear to go a step further and provide extra benefits, highlighting a trend seen throughout the world where policies are exported to host countries in order to share an organizational message as well as to attract and retain talent (Bardoel et al., 2008). Domestic companies tend to follow the informal Brazilian approach, where policies may not be explicit but arrangements are made with one's direct supervisors. Exceptions are granted as favors, and reciprocity is expected as a sign of loyalty toward the company or the individual´s in-group.

Conclusions

The main goal of this study was to explore the work-life interface in the Brazilian context and the unique role of the organization, the HR department and organizational policies in dealing with individual employee work-life challenges. Most conceptualizations to date have been done within developed country contexts, and as such may not be generalizable to other settings. Although single-country studies do not allow for comparisons at the country level, they are crucial to developing an understanding of work-life dynamics in understudied regions of the world. Indeed, we have found there to be some differences and commonalities with existing theories and research. As a general rule, if governments take on the main responsibility for

provisions, then employers may be able to do less (Den Dulk et al., 2012). However, in the case of Brazil, there is a dramatic difference in terms of work-life provisions between Brazilian and multinational firms. In local organizations, policies tend to be "for show". Similarly to international findings, smaller organizations are likely to offer fewer work-life arrangements, perhaps because they are less susceptible to institutional and economic pressures than larger organizations (Den Dulk et al., 2013).

The employment relationship and its actors (the government, organizations and individuals) operate and interact in a complex framework that is impacted by institutional and cultural forces. From inside the organization, there is the understanding that some of the work rights established by law are not always respected. For example, requesting pay for extra working hours may be viewed as lack of loyalty to one's colleagues and lack of commitment to the organization. Instead, in Brazilian firms, there is a clear preponderance of informal arrangements between supervisors and subordinates, but not necessarily a supportive culture throughout the organization itself. From a national culture perspective, the subordinate-supervisor relationship is consistent with Brazil´s status as an in-group collectivist country, but the individual responsibility for support contradicts this view (Javidan et al., 2006).

Brumley´s (2014) research on Mexican organizations shows a paternalistic approach in work-life issues, where employers 'take care' of their families while employees 'take care' of the business. We expected to find similar narratives, as previous findings show Brazil as high in the diffuseness dimension (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2014). Indeed, the country has a culture where work and personal life overlap, and relationships are nurtured for business objectives. Nonetheless, our study indicated a changing discourse where work and life are articulated as very separate domains. Research on work-life support shows that countries vary tremendously, even within the same region (e.g., Abendroth & Den Dulk, 2011). We also believe that there are generational differences to the way the work-life interface is managed and that there is a stronger tendency toward protecting work from spilling into life rather than the other way around.

Despite calls for a more active role by organizations in reconciling the work and life demands of its employees (Kossek et al., 2010), not much seems to have been done in Brazil regarding family and individual needs as a whole, and in particular, those of single parent families and the aging population. Our research has shown examples where family-supportive policies have

not made their way into formal organizational policy and practice and where there is little pressure from employees to change that. Unlike models developed elsewhere in the world, there seems to be an unspoken consensus that one´s personal and professional lives can be defined and experienced in numerous ways and, perhaps, Brazilians are comfortable living with ambiguity - with an acceptance that matters will be handled somehow. Going back to Felstead et al.´s (2002) definition of the work-life interface, and how cultural and institutional forces have an impact on work and non-work – if those forces operate in an orchestrated manner for insiders – despite a somewhat chaotic appearance to outsiders – then there is not much pressure for change.

Limitations and Future Research

The study suffers from several limitations. First, the majority of the sample is composed of women. Work-life issues are not issues that belong solely to women or those with dependent children as they affect everyone, although working women are one of the social groups that are most affected by the Brazilian work reality. A broader and deeper understanding of the local work-life interface (rather than the global) is an important step toward making work-life issues a priority in Brazil. Perhaps studies that address individual narratives could contribute to this process. Second, the respondents work in HR roles. As such, they may have biases in perpetuating organizational discourse, though they are a valuable source of information. It should also be noted that, in Brazil, the majority of HR employees are women.

In addition, this study focused on highly populated regions in Brazil, where most companies are located. Future studies should include other regions to address a larger section of the population, including lower-skilled employees, which are often under-researched. Furthermore, it is possible that urban studies may provide more contributions to future research, as urbanization may have a significant impact on work/non-work experiences (i.e., Languilaire, 2015). Finally, as a qualitative study, the results from this research may not be generalizable. As a follow-up to these findings, a quantitative larger-scale study may shed light on this very relevant and current topic that affects individuals profoundly in order to help redefine the role that organizations and institutions play in Brazilian society.

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